

Pirate Places

Warlock's Journal Contest #12

September 2014

Sponsored by Tabletop Adventures

Includes Bonus Material



Contents

Introduction	4
1. Black Olvaldir's Fort	5
2. Blue Clam Lagoon.....	6
3. Diver's Rest.....	7
4. Ganymede	8
5. Hoarfrost	9
6. Island o' th' Faceless Ones	10
7. Madame Gertrude's Bathhouse	11
8. Mumble The Peg	12
9. Peg's Leg Tavern.....	13
10. Rigging Town	14
11. "Seedys" Silver Bucket	15
12. Serlinda's Bodice	16
13. Serpent Bay	17
14. Ship Bane Bay.....	18
15. The Barrel Head	19
16. The Booty Chest	20
17. The Lords' Chambers	21
18. The Reef of Bones	22
BONUS CONTENT: Treasure Hunt.....	23
Treasure Hunt Shard Set	24
SPECIAL PREVIEW: Warlock's Journal Contest, October 2014	29

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The Warlock's Journal - Previous Contests:

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Contest #2, Nov. 2013: [Tales of a GM](#)

Contest #3, Dec. 2013: [Tiny Gork's Tinker Room](#)

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Contest #9, June 2014: [Soul Guardian Publishing](#)

Contest #10, July 2014: [Warlock's Sanctum Games](#)

Contest #11, August 2014: [Fields of Blood and Honor](#)

Contest #12, September 2014: [Tabletop Adventures](#)

Introduction

Ahoy there, and welcome to the Warlock's Journal Contest!

The Warlock's Journal is a roving contest, at a different blog or website each month. The host picks the topic and then solicits entries from the RPG community at large. When all the entries are in, they are shared with the community and a fan vote is taken for the most popular entry. In September 2014, the contest was hosted by Tabletop Adventures.

In honor of International Talk Like a Pirate Day on September 19th, the contest topic was "Pirate Places." The challenge given was to describe a location suitable for pirates, in less than 500 words. The ideas submitted range from harbors to taverns and other places with even shadier reputations. A few were locations no pirate would ever visit, given a choice, but one might find himself there nonetheless. Writers were allowed to submit more than one piece, and a few people chose to do so. The public was invited to vote on the entries (which were presented anonymously) and select the favorite.

The winner of the September 2014 Warlock's Journal Contest was Ben Moats, for his entry, "The Barrel Head." Congratulations, Ben, on having the favorite selection!

This is the final version of "Pirate Places", which gives the name of the author or each piece as well as acknowledging the winner. It also includes bonus material provided by Tabletop Adventures, as additional Help for the Harried Game Master.

Finally, links are provided for information on previous Warlock's Journal Contests. When possible the links include the final versions of the contest entries, for your reading pleasure or to use in games.

We hope ye be enjoyin' each scribin', mateys, an' wish ye fair winds an' good gamin'.

Them as calls themselves the worthy crew o' Tabletop Adventures,

And the scalawag what be the Overlord.

1. Black Olvaldir's Fort

Author: Phil Nicholls

"Listen close, my lads, for ye don' wanna be foolin' wi' Black Olvaldir, curse his stinking heart!

"There be few places in these Isles where I bain't sailin' agin, but I'd rather try my luck wi' Davy Jones than return to that thrice-cursed spot. Even lads wet behind the ears know of the tales o' that Fort, them dark stone walls a-bristlin wi' long nines.

"That's naught but the tip o' the iceberg, m' hearties. First ye have to sail into the harbour, past the chain o' rocks that grind together. His dark-hearted sorcery drags them rocks to his foul commands. Rocks a-hungering for pirate blood, rocks that scream their lust for ye, as ye sail past. All a-bangin' on your hull fit to burst the seams.

"Along wi' them long nines, Olvaldir has a battery of mortars deep in his Fort, that lob shells o' burning pitch onto your canvas, 'til the whole harbour be a firestorm. Ye keep sailin' to the shore, for there be no turning back once you attack Black Olvaldir.

"Only there be no safety on the shore. Oh, it all looks quiet, right enough, 'til you put yer first foot onto that sand. Sand as black as Olvaldir's withered heart. For then the surf behind ye erupts as his shark-men burst upon you in a wave of tooth and rage. Ever seen a man run wi' no head? Step on that beach o' black sand, an' ye be sure o' seeing that. Just hope it's not yer head that's burst like a melon.

"Greater men than I ran up the causeway to face the storm o' death around them grinning gates into the Fort. Me, I ran for the jungle as fast as me legs would carry me. Course, there were two of 'em then. The jungles around the Fort be full of spear traps and pits filled wi' bamboo spikes tipped wi' poison. Dead-eyed men hunt the depths o' the jungle, creatures with a taste for flesh.

"All I lost were an eye an' me leg, and I thank Lady Luck for the blessing!"

2. Blue Clam Lagoon

Author: Phil Nicholls

This small tropical island is home to a village of the same name. The mixed population of villagers fish and craft for a living. The large lagoon is a popular haunt for pirate ships in need of fresh water, supplies or just a hideout.

Blue Clam Lagoon is famous for the giant blue clams that thrive in the lagoon, and provide the villagers with their main revenues. The blue clams are a popular delicacy with pirates and sailors. Blue clam stew, otherwise known as a "bowl o' blue" is a staple dish on many ships, although the actual proportion of blue clam in the stew can be highly variable.

Local artisans carve the nacre from the clam shells to make jewelry and other decorative items, with inlaid pistol stocks being a specialty. Earning enough treasure to barter for a piece of blue shell is a rite of passage aboard some pirate ships.



Clam II – Deborah Austin - [Creative Commons](#)

3. Diver's Rest

Author: Dimitri Horaites

In the jungle several miles from Port Sally is a deep hole in the ground. The hole's walls are lined with jagged volcanic glass and human bones. Deep shadows obscure the bottom except during midday when a perceptive player might be able to see a black pool of water below. A popular ghost story tells of a pirate and her noble lover who were thrown into the pit by a local priest in punishment for their forbidden romance. The smell of smoke lingers and at night some say there is a reddish glow that lights the obsidian walls of the hole. Superstitious sailors say this is a sure sign the pit is a cursed entrance to hell. For all that there is a small and well-trod path leading to the pit from Port Sally.

Climbing down the hole is a long, difficult and dangerous process. Ropes and hands will regularly get frayed and cut by the slippery and jagged glass. Occasionally someone will try the climb and more often than not they die.

However, the more adventurous pirates and explorers may hear a rumor that jumping down the hole is considerably safer than climbing. Some may even be challenged to do it as a bet.

This is actually true. Jumping out far enough to avoid the walls of the hole will drop a person into a deep and placid pool of rain water. Stranger still, they will be greeted by a tavern sign bolted into the cave wall that says, "The Diver's Rest." Through the door is one of the most exclusive Taverns and Adventurers clubs around. The jumper may be offered a membership and if they take it they will be shown the secret stairs that lead down to the tavern from the jungle. They may even find that the friend who dared them to jump is a member. If the guest does not take the oath they will be sworn to secrecy and led blindfolded away from the tavern after a raucous night of free drinks. If the person tries to make trouble the club members, and especially the old husband and wife team who run the place, are much more capable than they seem.

4. Ganymede

Author: Ken Filewood

A dark floating mass seen at a distance turns out to be a raft, in the last stages of dissolution. It consists of three members: a ten-foot length of boom, splintered at one end, and scarred by musket balls; a warped old beam as thick as it is wide, from a ship's hull, with a mass of barnacles on one face; and the wooden stern plate, brightly painted in green on yellow, from a ship named 'Ganyme...'. The first two are lashed to opposite ends of the last with sun-bleached, hemp ropes of different thicknesses to form two corners of what was once a triangle. A dark tail of ragged cloth waving in the water at the far end of the boom suggests what might once have held the third corner of the triangle together, but the unbound ends trail loosely in the sea.

Several inches of water slosh in the bottom of large, open topped barrel that has been lashed inside the angle of the stern plate and the beam, providing most of the raft's remaining rigidity.

The point of a gutting knife has been jammed into the stern plate beside the barrel, and a length of fishing twine with a bent nail for a hook has been wrapped tightly around the handle. A number of stab wounds in the paint nearby show that the knife has been stored thus more than once. Someone has carved nineteen tally marks through the dark green paint of the 'G' and into the pale wood behind.

5. Hoarfrost

Author: Phil Nicholls

The town of Hoarfrost is known to most pirates as "the frosty whore".

The circular harbour is hacked from the ice of Niflheim, and has two exit channels. The Eastern Cut, past the looming bulk of Jack Frost's Rime Palace, leads out to the iceberg-haunted sea of upper Niflheim. Here ice whales play and vast kraken haunt the depths. Brave sailors may find passage into the glacial tunnels of Niflheim, but few ships return.

Of more interest to pirates is the Western Cut, a short canal that passes a pair of chanting Frost Giant sentinels. At the end of the canal stands a huge planar gate large enough to take a ship anywhere in the cosmos. Providing the Captain has the right key, of course. Ice Fey magic can be fickle, but the wharves of Hoarfrost are bustling. Enough ships make the risky passage to keep the town a warm refuge in a cold realm.

The town itself is a ramshackle affair, made from a variety of materials. The warehouses and many of the houses are built from blocks of ice, a cheap building material on frozen Niflheim. Notably, the Breath of Fenris tavern is the largest drinking establishment in Hoarfrost, and this is built from blocks of black ice. Rumour has it that several rowdy patrons have been entombed in the ice, the very blocks used to repair the damage they caused during their last fight.

The majority of establishments to service the needs of visiting pirates, rogues and planar travellers are constructed from hulks of ships. If a Captain cannot barter for the right key to leave through the planar gate, or neglects to pay her dues to Jack Frost, then her only option may be to sell her ship to buy passage off Niflheim.

These hulks are usually hauled ashore, dismasted, then flipped over so that their curved hulls can better withstand the howling ice storms. Properly converted, the hulks provide warm, and often luxurious accommodation. Several converted ships are taverns and flophouses, two offer bawdier entertainment and one twin-hulled galleon is an expensive hotel catering to planar travellers.

Two inter-planar merchant guilds have built ornate houses here, constructed from stone imported block-by-block at great expense. Each guild seeks a monopoly on trade in Hoarfrost, their Factors glare at each other from opposite ends of the long wharf. Their agents stalk the cold alleys of the town in a lengthy game of industrial espionage. Yet, this competition keeps prices high and ensures a ready market for imported treasures.

Hoarfrost is patrolled by Frost Shields in bronze armour that resists the cold. Inevitably, these have been labelled "Brass Monkeys" by the pirates. The town guards are more interested in protecting the buildings and ensuring taxes are paid to the Rime Palace. Thus, they do little to curb any rowdy behaviour by visitors. The harsh climate is usually enough to keep pirates inside the taverns, huddled over steaming tankards of hot grog.

6. Island o' th' Faceless Ones

Author: Charlie Fleming

Th' island o' th' Faceless Ones ain't an easy one t' reach. Th' actual size o' th' island has ne'er been confirmed, but 'tis believed t' be 33 miles from North t' South 'n 46 miles across. Th' island be covered in a dense jungle that mighty few 'ave dared t' venture into. Even fewer 'ave made it back alive. Ships cannot land on th' North side o' th' island due t' th' sheer rocky cliffs that tower 350 feet above sea level. Th' jungle stretches t' th' ends o' th' East 'n West shores makin' it mighty tricky t' land. Th' only point o' entry be th' sliver o' beach on th' South shore. Th' jungle cuts a hard line right at th' edge o' th' beach, as if darin' it t' move further inland.

Now fer th' beasties that call th' Island ship. Th' namesake o' th' island are th' Faceless Ones. These faceless, hairless tailed imp like creatures wit' dark, leathery skin live in th' jungles where th' dense tree ceilin' limits th' light that comes through. They be always encountered in groups 'n usually attack if thar territory be threatened or fer grub. Thar are rumors o' hundreds if nah a thousand o' these creatures livin' on th' island.

Around th' perimeter o' th' jungle on th' East, South, 'n west shores, thar lives tribes o' Gruggs. Gruggs are mighty short mighty hairy primitive humanoids wit' big tusks protrudin' from thar bottom jaw. They be fierce when provoked 'n do nah like outsiders.

Thar are underwater caves in th' cliffs t' th' North that are believed t' be th' homes o' th' Luscas. These great beasts are part shark 'n part octopus 'n 'ave a great taste o' blood.

Th' island be believed t' hold a mystery in 'tis heart as no one has ever ventured t' or come back alive from th' center o' th' island. Some believe that 'cause o' 'tis less than welcome environment pirates 'ave hidden many treasures thar fer safe keepin'. Others 'ave heard tale o' entrances t' great caves inside th' jungle that hold many unseen horrors. Th' general consensus be that no one has any business bein' thar, lest they be lookin' fer trouble or death, 'n t' jus' steer clear o' it.



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7. Madame Gertrude's Bathhouse

Author: JP Chapleau

To many captains, the best place to gather rumors and information is at a tavern or an inn. To the crafty one, Madame Gertrude's bathhouse is really the place to learn what is happening. Officially, a place where one can get a shave, a bath, and have garments repaired, the women offer many more services to those who simply ask and who have coin.

It is a place to parlay and negotiate between feuding or warring bands. Madame Gertrude does not tolerate violence in her establishment and more than one captain met his end after breaking the truce.

The timber buildings form an enclave of four wings allowing both privacy and room for nighttime entertainment. The front wing has a small public room where drinks and music are available day and night. Hot springs in the central courtyard serve to bathe the guests and wash clothes. One wing is reserved for the working girls and their clients. One wing is reserved for the kitchens and stockpiles. The final wing is reserved for Madame Gertrude. Other than the common room where partying is almost constant, the place is clean and constantly maintained by local hired hands.

The locals officially dislike the place but Madame Gertrude pays for information they overhear. While publicly denouncing the establishment as a house of ill repute, most of them sell information to Madame Gertrude and work for her. They serve as added security and increase the information gathering ability of the Madame: while many pirates keep quiet around the girls, few worry watching their tongues near locals that hate the place. The locals frequently overhear talks just under their windows.

Madame Gertrude is a graceful woman of mixed race and indeterminate age whose origins are shrouded in mystery. However, rumors persist that she was the mistress of a king who escaped execution for knowing too much. Today, she has enough information that no one wishes to see her dead for an agent of hers may reveal secrets and ruin people in more than one country.

Each of her girls is here of her own free will. They all have their own sad story as to why they are here, the veracity of which is much harder to ascertain.

8. Mumble The Peg

Author: Kyle R Henderson

Mumblety-peg is a popular wharf tavern frequented by pirates and other less-than-savory nautical types. There is nothing special about The Peg as it is called, except the patch of hard packed bare earth in the center of the room where players gather for a game of Mumblety-peg.

Mumblety-Peg is a dagger throwing game popular among street toughs, sailors and professional fighting men. The object of this game is for each player to flip or toss a dagger in a series of moves such that, after each move, the dagger sticks erect in the ground. Some common moves are flipping the knife from the palm, from the back of the hand, and from between the teeth. Players perform in turns until they miss, resuming after other players miss unless one player wins by successfully performing all positions.

The tavern's and game's name comes from a forfeit required in the early days of the game: a small peg was driven into the ground by a prescribed number of dagger blows, and if you lost you had to "mumble the peg" — that is, pull it out with your teeth. A common wager these days is an amount of coin (usually copper) agreed upon by both (or all) parties. Though some of the rougher crowd prefer the original version and when this happens a whole new round of betting happens. The bets are to see how many tries it will take them to, or indeed IF they can, mumble the peg.

The Peg's proprietor allows such games as long as the house gets a cut. He also keeps a souvenir jar of lost teeth from the game proudly on display on a shelf behind the bar.

9. Peg's Leg Tavern

Author: Ivor Pugh

It is a cold night in Karran. You finally see the sign for the tavern you have been looking for. You could hear the sounds of music, singing, the clinking of mugs and voices from two buildings down the street. As you enter the main room a tall, middle-aged woman walks over in greeting. "Welcome to Peg's Leg," she says, "the best tavern this side of The Great Sea. And that other side too I'd wager. Everyone comes through those doors, looking for something... We usually have that something." She smiles. "I am Peg, and this is my Leg." With one arm she gestures out across a room that suggests comfort after your months at sea; the other arm reveals her leg under a split in her skirt. She laughs at her joke.

"You look thirsty, let me buy you a round of drinks. I pride myself on hospitality, but, mind you, you pay for yourself after that. Remember, all sales are final."

You sit into the chair she suggests. "Now let me tell you about what we can do here, stranger. This is a good rum; drink. You can always find good food and good drinks here. But we offer more than that. Maybe you have heard that Peg's Leg is a place where loose coins and loose morals mix." She pauses for a reaction, watching you with her big, icy blue eyes. You sip the rum and feel its warmth.

"It is true. Gambling tables are in the back room, but you must buy chips from me. No coins at the tables. The house takes 5% every time you change chips for cash or cash for chips. Bonny John and his brother will settle any trouble, complaints or disputes." Over her shoulder you can see two giant battle-scarred men with clubs. "Upstairs are the girls for.... a different kind of entertainment. You can pay in chips or cash up front. If you cause trouble, Bonny John and The Huge will be happy to end your troubles." She paused to be sure you understand.

"Like I said, everyone comes through those doors, so what I have that costs the most is information. Amazing what is revealed on a pillow or over a glass of rum. Or what is said or sold at the market. Perhaps you want to know who is selling what things? Who suddenly has cash? Where can I find pirates for a ship? Where is the person you seek? Everyone has a question, and sooner or later they come to ask me. Now tell me, what brings you to Peg's Leg?"

10. Rigging Town

Author: Dimitri Horaites

Strung out across a sea cleft on the Isla de las Naranjas is a curious port hung on ropes and chains. Boats, barrels, sheds, tents and even hunks of old wrecks have been dragged into the air by the folks who call it home. A pirate needs a sure step and strong arms for there are no paths connecting the "buildings", only ropes. Some of the taverns have nets to save unlucky drunks, and it's popular fun to mock passed out rummys hanging upside down in the air.

Rigging Town is known to the authorities but surprisingly hard to assault. Due to a sharp bend in the cleft the town is mostly hidden from view and shielded from cannon shot. Fresh water is provided from a waterfall springing out of the northern cliff face. Chains strung across the gap prevent vessels with sails from entering the cleft without permission. Accessing Rigging Town involves sailing or rowing up the cleft at high tide and then convincing the locals to drop a rope ladder or use hooks to drag your jolly boat into the air. For the right price the locals can dry dock ships as large as a sloop hundreds of feet in the air.

Reputation and trust are everything in Rigging Town. With the right friends a wanted man can hide here for years safe from ten angry navies. If he betrays the peculiar thieves' honor of the locals...? Well, he's in for a nasty drop.

11. "Seedys" Silver Bucket

Author: Michael Christensen

The wooden sign above the door hangs on just one rusty chain now; the painted image of a silver bucket is faded and worn. The air is rife with alcohol and smoke and the working man's smell. Behind the less than sturdy front door lies the tavern of Ol' Seedy, a place where a sailor can hang his cutlass and drown his sore sea-tried throat.

The common drinking area is big enough for 30 men and directly opposite the front door at the back of the room you find the bar and Ol' Seedy polishing his mugs. The walls are covered in what appears to be random junk, one lonely oar, a worn captains hat, several glass orbs in nets, and many other even stranger things.

They say Ol' Seedy is filthy rich, beyond compare of any pirate that ever lived although the stories about how he became so rich are bountiful and plenty. More than one ignorant sea rat has tried his luck at finding the treasure of Ol' Seedy's Silver Bucket, but they are usually never seen again. Some do come back from their adventure, but they act as if they are only half awake from a long night's sleep.

Truce reigns in Ol' Seedy's tavern. Nobody fights or kills anyone in the Silver Bucket; it is an old tradition and the pirates who comes here have forgotten why but just know that is how it is.

Ol' Seedy himself appears to be in his prime: good physique, good health and a healthy fill of dark dry wit. Many pirate captains sometimes stop by the Silver Bucket to pay tribute to Ol' Seedy, often with loot but none other than Ol' Seedy and the captains know any deeper meaning to this.

One of the corners of the common drinking room has over time become the regular spot of one particular individual whom sailors of the crossed bones often seek out. Madame Blue, so named because of her many blue beads in her hair, is believed to be able to tell you the future and other sagely things if you go to her with proper payment.

12. Serlinda's Bodice

Author: Dominick Riesland

Serlinda's Bodice is an island about 50 miles northeast of Jamaica. It features two prominent hills, each with a number of caves. Although the beaches are narrow, a few well-placed docks enable access to the island.

The largest cave of Serlinda's Bodice hosts a temple to Serlinda, the aspect of an ancient tempest goddess that focuses on the gentle rains that grow. There are thirteen sconces for torches surrounding a central altar with a top that can obviously be removed. Inside the altar are twelve rum bottles of various ages. The tradition is to bring a full bottle of rum to the altar, replace a bottle from the altar with yours, and then drink the bottle you took, toasting Serlinda with each swig. Tradition says Serlinda will honor those who complete the ritual, but will punish those who take advantage of a participant (including someone passed out after completing it).

The other caves make good places to hide treasure. (Participation in the ritual is not necessary.) Anywhere from 10-30 separate treasures are hidden on the island at any time. Some treasures have been there for centuries, as the pirate who buried them has long since died. Others are newly buried, and some were discovered early as the pirate who hid them was careless.

In order to disguise the importance of the island, a number of pirates have taken to referring to women they deal with on the high seas as Serlinda. Officials who capture these pirates are often told that their booty is "hidden in Serlinda's Bodice," which makes it unclear whether they mean the island or something else.



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13. Serpent Bay

Author: Dean Keith

Serpent Bay is a large, round, pale green bay. It is surrounded by imposing rock cliffs with a small opening to the sea. The protected nature of the bay causes a constant breeze to blow out, creating a light mist and making the bay appear to be breathing smoke. The breeze also causes the water to gently ripple, making it look like scales. This, combined with the mist, gives the bay its name. There are two white sand beaches across from the entrance, separated by the largest of the cliffs. Hidden caves are scattered throughout the cliffs, making the bay a haven for pirates wishing to stash anything they don't want easily found.

The water is warm and crystal clear allowing seaweed to flourish, giving the bay its green tint. The wreckage of numerous ships can be seen sunken in the seaweed on the bottom of the bay.

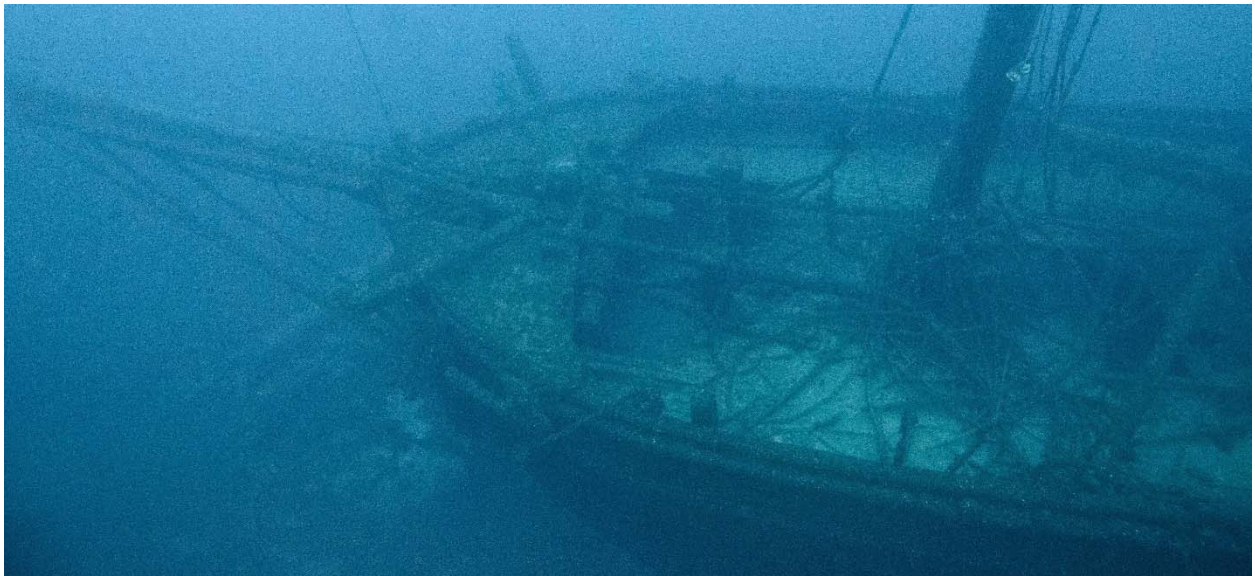
It is said the bay is haunted by those who have drowned in the water. Rumors abound about pirates having concocted this to keep people away. Whether or not it is true, it works, as most sailors steadfastly avoid the bay.

14. Ship Bane Bay

Author: Dean Keith

Ship Bane Bay is a small, shallow, ovoid bay made even more shallow by the numerous ships sunk under the calm waters. The entrance is just as shallow as the rest of the bay, but even more dangerous due to rock reefs lurking just under the surface. One safe passage exists through the reefs, known only to a few. Most of the surrounding land is heavily forested save a small, white sand beach to the left of the entrance. A small stream runs along the right side of the beach, providing fresh water to those moored nearby. Ample fruits and nuts from the trees, along with abundant fish in the bay, can provide for a ship's crew for many weeks.

The easily accessible food and water, combined with the difficulty in accessing the bay, makes it a perfect place to seek refuge from pursuers.



NOAA Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary - [Creative Commons](#) - cropped

15. The Barrel Head

Author: Ben Moats, CONTEST WINNER!

On the outskirts of town, just west of the main road, there is a small clearing in the woods. In this clearing is a normal looking barrel, wedged between the roots of a mighty oak. The barrel is unmovable and the lid is locked with an old brass key-lock. If the pirate has the right key and unlocks the top he will discover the secret kept inside.

The barrel has a false bottom and once removed exposes a wooden ladder and a tunnel that leads deep underground. The tunnel ends in a large underground room. Upon crossing the threshold the torches that line the wall seem to light magically by themselves. In the center of the room sits a table and several stools. Standing seemingly haphazardly around the room are statues of past Pirate Kings, and as a pirate moves about the room the eyes of these great pirates seem to follow there every step.

Any deal or bargain struck in this room is bound by pirate law to be obeyed. While in the room no pirate is to harm another pirate under penalty of death.

16. The Booty Chest

Author: Tim Latham

On the beach of Tortuga there is a two-story building made of stone and wood. On the upper balcony several strumpets lean over calling to come visit, as they expose their uppers for you.

You pause to admire the sign hanging over the doorway. On it a treasure chest lies open with a horde of coin, jewels, and other valuables heaped high. Leaning over the top of it is a sultry wench with an ample chest of her own treasures. She smiles and beckons you to enter her domain and sample her wares.

Inside you find roughly plastered walls adorned with netting and a few old and broken weapons, as well as paintings of ships. You recognize several of them as you gaze upon Kidd's *Adventure Galley* and the *Queen Anne's Revenge* captained by Edward Teach.

Overhead, chandlers made from ships wheels and wagon wheels hang, each with six to eight oil lamps which burn with a whisper of smoke drifting to the stained roof. Tables, about a dozen are scattered around the room, some round, some square, all weather worn with a small oil lamp in the middle of each.

Ornamented posts, carved with sea creatures and voodoo symbols, hold up the second story. Your eye's to wander to the left towards the stairs that lead to the second floor where the friendly ladies from before ply their trade.

Next to the stairs is the entrance to the owner's personal chambers. She was as handy with a sword and pistol as any of the brethren you ever sailed with; no man crossed her threshold unless she gave express permission.

Towards the back of the room is the bar, made from eight hogshead casks standing on end. Along the bottom lies a spar from the foremast of a Spanish frigate, attached in such a way to allow you to rest your boot on it. Between the casks, brass and iron spittoons are placed for easy access of those that like to chew the leaf.

The top of the bar is made from fine English black oak, the same oak that has for many years made the walls of the ships from the British navy so strong. On the back bar, another painting like the doorway sign hangs there surrounded by glasses, bottles and stone crocks of the various wares the watering hole serves.

A small ship's wheel raises a metal portcullis the size of a ships door, which leads to a wine cellar. There are legends and tales of that chamber; some say it holds the finest of wines and whiskies. Ales and beer kegs were said to be stacked to the roof... but there were other tales that the portal leads to the lady's treasure room, stacked high with plunder. It was also told that it was a bolt hole that led into the hillside behind, a place of safety if one of the major nations finally decided to clean out the island of its rogues.

17. The Lords' Chambers

Author: Ken Filewood

From street level, all that a traveler sees of the Lords' Chambers is a row of six well-spaced gaps, each the size and shape of a house brick, peering into the lowest course of the heavy limestone masonry at the foot of Fort Donahue. Here colleagues sometimes crouch on all fours, beards brushing the dusty cobbles as they lower themselves to hear what the residents have to say about the accommodations. It is seldom kind.

A friend of the Governor may visit the cell under the supervision of his soldiers. He enters by a heavy oak doorway off one of the passages that serves the fort's underground chambers. But first, a simple brass knob slides a shutter along a pair of iron tracks to let the visitor peer into the gloom. The stink of the place creeps under the door, but it is only when the guards have unchained the bar, lifted it aside and dragged open the door against protesting hinges that the eye-watering majesty of the air inside can be truly appreciated. Long tradition demands that inmates chained nearest the doorway empty their bowels and bladders as near to their captors' point of entry as bonds permit.

Except two courses of stone at the top of the furthest wall, the prison is chiseled out of solid stone. A shallow barrel vault of fire-blackened limestone blocks reaches about eight feet at its highest. The space is about 15 feet wide, and 30 feet long from doorway to the row of six little windows at the far end. They are above the visitor's head height, and by day admit a diffuse light and muffled street noises. A shallow drain along the right hand wall is incapable of removing solid waste.

Each prisoner's manacles are chained to one of five large iron rings set into the floor at equal intervals down the center of the room. An inhabitant chained at the last ring might touch the wall with an outstretched foot, but his hands will never reach the windows. Only his voice can ever do that.

18. The Reef of Bones

Authors: Andrew and Heleen Durston

Introduction:

In hot sluggish doldrums, where currents end and storms drift to die, the Reef of Bones stretches across lonely ocean, stark against the deep blue sea. These ancient seamounts have been worn down to a shade of their former glory. The shores are covered with the detritus: bone, flesh, wood, and metal of a thousand years of storms, war, accident, and magic. Sun-drenched dry isles, covered with scrub and small lonely trees, are home to white crabs and sea vultures, which peer at the weather, watching as the currents push the dead to their dinner table.

Geography:

The Reef of Bones is an irregular line of isles covering about 50 miles of ocean. The largest isle is perhaps two miles long, half of that wide. They rise no higher than a hundred feet or so out of ocean. Wrecks dot the beaches, mixed with driftwood and seaweed in great masses. Inland the white sand is dotted with stranger fragments dropped by passing typhoons and waterspouts. A narrow shelf of shallow water surrounds the island chain, ending in a precipitous drop to abyssal depths.

Inhabitants/features:

There are no known humanoid inhabitants of the Reefs. No fresh water and little food but what is caught or scavenged has limited the locals to crustaceans and birds. The crabs are unique, featuring a bone-white shell which, when closed, resembles an ocean-worn pebble. Should a large number begin to move, it appears as if the beach itself is relocating. Sitting on the end of gray driftwood logs or atop dwarf trees, the pale gray sea vultures ponder the crabs and the sea beyond. Deposited years ago by accident, the birds have prospered, feeding on gulls, fish, and any unfortunate who washes ashore.

Adventure Threads:

A drunken sailor tells a tale of a beach glittering with a thousand pearls in bright sun. A king's ransom could be yours for the taking.

A Significant Letter

My dear Daughter,

This is, in effect, my last will and testament. My luck finally ran out: my ship is destroyed, my crew of years gone, and I wasted almost away on that cursed shore before another freebooter found me and delivered me to the closest thing to a friendly port. I don't think I will live to see you again so I leave this missive with Black Pete at the Wheel and Star and he says he will send it to you. I don't believe he will read it; that is, I don't believe he can read, much, and my terrible 'chicken scratching' (as you call my handwriting) may be our best protection now.

I have left your heritage for you on the island where I first met your mother, if you can claim it. I will never forget that day – we saw the wreckage after the storm and stopped to see what we could salvage, but I never expected to salvage the captain's daughter. A braver woman I never met; the crew was most annoyed when she refused to be ransomed but insisted on staying with us instead. In any case, you know which island I mean though you have never been there. To find the inheritance of a pirate's daughter, this is what you must do.

Coming from the south, circle the island to port until you round Torch Point. Get as close to the coast as you can and look for The Beak. Go ashore and stand in the Beak, looking out past its tip across the island. From there you should be able to see, high up, The Maw. Take a compass reading and note it well, for you won't be able to keep a straight line through the jungle in between. What you can't see, because the rise of the land hides it, is a gorge that cuts across the center of the island. The only way to cross it is on the bridge the locals build made of thick vines and some boards cut relatively flat. The best time to cross – especially if you plan to be carrying heavy things, as we were – is after the rainy season is over and the villagers have had time to remake the bridge after the damage done by the year's storms. The bridge is almost on the compass line between the Beak and the Maw, though, so when you find it you'll know you're on course.

There are at least two villages on the island and probably more. The locals are none too friendly, but they mostly keep themselves to themselves so if you swing wide around the villages they will likely leave you alone.

From the gorge you keep climbing through the forest on your compass line until you get to the high rocky area where there aren't so many trees. If you're on the right heading you'll be able to see the Maw. You'll know it right away; it looks like the open mouth of a dragon and sometimes smoke even comes out! From there the going should be easy, or at least relatively so. Why go to all the trouble of crossing the whole island, you ask, if the formation is so easily visible? Two reasons. First, it is very hard to recognize from any other angle, and second, because the other side of the Maw is a sheer cliff hundreds of feet tall. Unless you've learned to fly, my dear, just go around the other way.

When you reach the Maw you will need to get your courage up; even though it's not a real wyrm, it looks and smells like one. Don't mind the dark, or the stink! Walk into the dragon's mouth, and slide down its gullet, and there you'll find everything I have left for you. Oh, and you may want to be extra careful on the last couple steps of the journey as I've left a few surprises to be sure others don't take what is rightfully yours.

Farewell, then, my sweet, until our souls meet on the great sea of the gods.

Yours always,

Father

Treasure Hunt Shard Set

Note to Game Masters

Shards, in Tabletop Adventures products, are pieces which describe a particular location, condition, or season, and which a Game Master must place specifically rather than using them randomly. A Shard Set is a group of such descriptions which lead through a setting or situation. The text is written to be read aloud to players, with notes to the GM in *[italics inside square brackets]* if necessary. The Game Master should read as much as appropriate, then give characters (and players) a chance to react to the situation before going on to the next piece of description.

For example, in reading the description of the Beak, the GM may read the brief description of the area around the Beak and then let the players state whether their characters walk into the open area under the Beak, and which (if any) finally looks out in the direction of The Maw. When reading the description of the gorge, possibly pause to let the players decide how the characters will search for the vine bridge and perhaps require a random check to determine who spots the footings of the destroyed bridge.

If a Game Master wishes to require some checks of skill or chance at certain spots, simply apply appropriate mechanics from the relevant game system and then use the descriptions to tell the players as much as their characters would know. This Shard Set does not attempt to describe every step of a hunt for hidden treasure, just a few key points which can be tied together by the GM's imagination. In addition the Game Master may wish to add creature encounters, which are not included.

Provide the letter (above) to the characters in whatever manner is appropriate to your game. If desired, there could be a sketch of the island in the corner of the page, or even a separate page with an elaborate map. It may be a few years old, or decades. It could even be the inheritance of one of the characters! When the group finally reaches the island, use some of the following descriptions to give the players a sense of what their characters experience.

Approaching the Island

Following the old pirate's instructions, you approach the island from the south. Turning the ship to port, you scan the coastline for his landmarks. Rounding one point of land, the lookout cries out. She has spotted what may be Torch Rock: an outward-thrusting piece of land with a stone formation rising from it which is narrow at the bottom and widens out toward the top. It does indeed look like a giant torch, as if it is just waiting for someone to set it aflame to light up the headland.

Following the Coast

Past that point the coast becomes rocky with only a narrow beach and a sharp drop off into the sea, so the water is still deep enough for the ship closer to the island. Huge stones, much taller than a man, lie half-buried in the earth or piled up on top of each other. Finally someone sees one that could be The Beak: a large, rounded rock which is hollow underneath, as if the lower portion had broken out or worn away. You can see daylight below that rough edge, and the tip of it turns down like the beak of a bird of prey.

The Beak

Near the Beak, rocks six to ten feet tall lie scattered around as if tumbled by a giant hand. The hollow area under the Beak itself rises more than 20 feet high, and sounds echo on the hard ceiling. Even the tip, which from a distance seemed to hang almost to the ground, is no closer to it than ten feet. You stand directly under the tip and look out from the opening.

Beyond the rocks in the foreground the forest begins, and thickens as the ground rises. Either the ground slopes steeply up or the trees grow very tall, because the tops climb higher and higher. Your gaze sweeps up across the green canopy to another rocky area at the highest point of the island and there you see it – The Maw, looking very much like the open mouth of a dragon as seen from the side, with jagged teeth both above and below. A taller hill to the left (as you are viewing it) almost seems to be hiding its eye, closed now but just waiting to open and spot its prey. For a moment you think you see smoke coming from that gargantuan mouth, but then the white curls move and you realize they are just clouds in the distant sky.



Stolz Gary M, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Public Domain

Into the Forest

When you move into the thick tropical forest, the broad leaves overhead block the heat of the sun but the thick foliage also blocks most of the breeze from the ocean. It is very humid under the green canopy and plants in abundance thrive in the moist atmosphere. The going is slow, requiring hacking away clumps of vines to make room to pass as well as being alert for snakes and other dangerous animals. You try your best to stay on the proper compass heading, but it isn't easy. The ground rises sharply as you travel on, which just adds to the difficulty.

The Gorge

After quite some time under the thick cover of the forest you finally come to an area where the trees are thinning. There seems to be a large clear area ahead where no trees grow. You come out of the forest into a bushy area and finally have a good view of the open space: an area where no trees grow because the ground falls sharply away into a deep gorge. After scouting up and down the bank of the gorge for a little distance, you discover the foundations of the bridge mentioned in the pirate's letter. The bridge itself is completely gone, though you can spot the foundation remaining on the opposite edge also. The side of the gorge below you is steep but it might be possible to get down using ropes. That doesn't solve how to get up the other side, though.

[GM Note: The villagers on the island were wiped out by a plague, so no one was left to maintain the bridge. If the party searches they might find a ruined village a few miles from the former location of the bridge. If a GM does not prefer this explanation, he or she may come up with another reason for the bridge's condition, or modify the description to suit whatever is desired for the game.]



Back into the Forest

After finally getting past the gorge, you set out again toward the Maw. The ground is still rising and the thick tropical forest blocks your view in the direction of the rock formation so you keep your heading as best you can, making your way around huge tree trunks and impenetrable thickets of underbrush.

Spotting the Maw

Finally the ground beneath your feet starts to level off, smoothing to only a slight slope. The trees here are shorter and the canopy less dense so more sunlight reaches you, as does the heat. You spy a rocky area ahead and pass a line of trees to see a large rock formation some distance ahead of you. The shape is odd; maybe you can make it out to look like a dragon if you tilt your head just right, but it is not what you were expecting. A check of your compass shows you to be slightly off your intended heading, though, so you travel along the edge of the rocky area to approach from the correct direction. Once you reach the line you should have been on you look up and find that the rock formation now really does look like a dragon's maw, ready to breath fire or swallow someone whole – an unnerving thought. One thing you can make out now is that a rocky hill leads up to the very outside edge of the Maw, and the 'lower jaw' appears to be a bridge of sorts leading into the rock formation itself. There even appears to be some sort of 'tongue' in the open 'mouth.'

[GM Note: This would be an appropriate area to locate one of the old pirate's traps, such as a pit trap covered with dirt and rocks. It needs to be simple enough that it could have been waiting for years and still take effect if the characters trip it. The group could have a chance to notice and avoid the trap, or not, at the GM's option.]

Up the Slope

After having crossed the relatively easy rock covering most of the high slope, you come to a fairly steep climb with a lot of loose rock. This could be dangerous, as a slip could cause loose rock to injure someone further down or even start an avalanche. People scramble up using both hands and feet, keeping an eye out for serpents and stinging insects, which often live in crevices in area like this.

Missing Teeth

At the top you reach a flat area that is almost like an approach to a drawbridge and you can look straight into the Maw. Unfortunately, from this position you can also see that there has been a change to the rock formation in the years since the old pirate was last here. There was evidently a landslide down the cliff on the other side of the rock, and most of the 'lower jaw' of the Maw fell away. The remaining portion has many jagged rock 'teeth', to which you could attach ropes, but there is almost no ledge left where you can step. It would be a very precarious trip! Then you notice the 'tongue' you spotted earlier. It is a large log, hanging somehow by thick metal wires in the middle of the Maw. You estimate it would be about four feet above the lower part of the 'jaw' and the end facing you is sharpened.

[GM Note: This hanging log is what remains of a trap. It was set with a tripwire which was pulled when the landslide took place. The remains of the snapped tripwire can be found

wrapped around some of the remaining 'fangs.' The hanging log and the wires supporting it are still sturdy and could possibly be used in an effort to cross this area.]

In the Mouth

Inside the Maw the light is very dim. The center of the ceiling is perhaps eight feet high, sloping down along the sides, and the floor is littered with loose rocks which could become a hazard. The whole area stinks of rotten eggs and there is a nasty taste on your tongue; the odor seems to become stronger the further into the cave you go. The open area of the 'mouth' becomes quite dark toward the back; even torches and other light sources seem dimmed in that area. At the very back of the chamber, a small ledge of stone extends out over the center of a drop of unknown depth.

[GM Note: Some type of magic in this cave suppresses light. Any light source will illuminate only about half of what it would usually show. The ledge of stone is the final trap. If it holds over 100 pounds of weight for more than a few seconds, it will crumble and drop anything on it down about 30 feet, or more, at the GM's discretion. To descend in greater safety, people should slide down the slope to either side of the small ledge. Climbing back up will be very difficult without ropes, however. The odor comes from gasses released deep in the cave but it is not dangerous in its present concentration.]

Down the Gullet

Along each wall at the back of the 'mouth,' the rock drops off at an angle. This must be what the pirate called "The Gullet." The rock looks smooth enough to allow a person to slide down, as suggested in the letter. The darkness is almost total, however. Sliding down holding a torch would be trickier, but might ultimately be safer than heading into the unknown.

[GM Note: A torch or magical light could be dropped to the bottom of the Gullet and would provide some idea of the depth of the slide. The GM may place at the bottom whatever treasure is appropriate for the difficulty of the adventure and the game system.]

SPECIAL PREVIEW: Warlock's Journal Contest, October 2014

The next round of the roving Warlock's Journal Contest will be held at the [Tales of a GM](#) blog. The contest does not officially open until October 1st, but as a bonus the host has agreed to provide a short preview. Phil at Tales of a GM focuses the contest on a group called "Storm and Shield," for which he is allowing crowd development. The structure of the group itself, its nemesis, and later the headquarters of both groups, have been determined through the process of this contest! Following is a summary of the October Contest details; full information will be posted at Tales of a GM on October 1st.

The Contest

Storm & Shield: The Inner Council

Storm and Shield Prime is controlled from The Planar City, but who are the ruling Inner Council? The focus of this contest is to create members of that illustrious body. The previous leader of Storm & Shield has died, perhaps as a consequence of one of Hanna Crip's schemes. Thus, it is election time on the Inner Council. The voting process for this round of the Warlock's Journal will select a new leader from the submissions.

So who are the Ruling body? Submit a description of a member of the Inner Council. There is no set format, but you may like to consider the following elements for your Councilor:

- A name
- A brief description of their appearance
- An overview of their current portfolio of responsibilities on the Council
- Their history within Storm & Shield
- A manifesto of their goals as a potential leader.

Johnn Four of "Roleplaying Tips" has kindly agreed to sponsor this round of the Warlock's Journal. The prize for this NPC generation contest is an electronic copy of his ENnie Award-winning "NPC Essentials" book.

The closing date for entries will be October 21st, 2014. For a complete list of the entry conditions please visit my [Tales of a GM](#) blog in early October.

Best of luck,
Phil

